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ABSTRACT

The ways in which individual German language teachers can help students of business secure for themselves junior management-level internships with German firms are discussed. The individual approach rather than participation in a ready-made program is seen as valuable because it requires the student to take initiative, develop his or her individual entrepreneurial spirit, and gain experience in job-seeking. The considerations for students in seeking internships abroad are outlined, including: (1) knowledge of European Community and German federal and local laws and regulations, (2) timing the application, (3) knowing where to look for potential internships, and (4) making and developing contacts abroad. Special hints and useful resources are noted. (MSE)

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INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS OF BUSINESS GERMAN

by

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INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS OF GERMAN

presented

at the Seventh Annual EMU Conference on
Languages and Communication for
World Business and the Professions

by
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As you know, the picture in foreign language instruction has brightened somewhat in recent years. This has been due in part to expressions of official support. I'm thinking, for instance, of Paul Simon's bill or President Reagan's exhorting the nation (during foreign language week recently) to study more languages. Once again, many instituations are making foreign language study mandatory for graduation. Another factor in the turnaround - more important than official support, I think - has been the proliferation of courses in the field of foreign language for business, ranging from entire programs to single course offerings. Nationwide, the realization has taken hold that orienting foreign language courses to students aspiring to international business or service careers, rather than only to those relatively few students whose interests are mainly cultural or literary, is not only a responsible and fruitful way of spending tax dollars, but also greatly increases student enrollment. We need only observe the growth of this conference over the years since its inception to realize the

magnitude of this change.

Naturally, as more and more institutions conform to this trend, those institutions which were among the first to offer language-for-business programs are losing their competitive advantage in attracting students. Thus, the question arises of how a given institution, or, for that matter, a given language section within a department, can compete more effectively for students, i.e., once again gain a competitive edge? It is my conviction and has been been our experience in the German section at Thunderbird, that enabling the student to cap his foreign language studies with an internship in the target-language country, in our case West Germany, is one of the most useful and effective ways to attract him or her to the study of German. In the academic year following the insertion into our catalogue of information on our German exchange program and internship, enrollment in German increased 50% at Thunderbird.

About three years ago Thunderbird entered into a student exchange program with the European Business School near Wiesbaden, where our German students can elect to study for one semester, providing they have met certain language and other prerequisite requirements. An internship of usually three months' duration with a German multinational corporation is automatically attached to that semester. We at Thunderbird would strongly urge our colleagues at other institutions to seek out foreign exchange programs that

provide relevant work experience to their students, or to do everything possible to add that dimension to their existing foreign language programs. In the case of the customary partner institution, namely, a traditional German university such as Heidelberg or Freiburg, this may be difficult to do, however, other than through personal involvement of the stateside language professor, such as making personal contacts and arrangements with German firms on behalf of the students. The European Business School is, to my knowledge, the only private business school with academic university accreditation in the FRG, and therefore, similar arrangements providing automatic business internships may be hard to come by. I want to focus the major part of my remarks, therefore, on how you, as individual German language instructors, can help individual students to secure junior management-level internships with German firms.

I mentioned that owing to our exchange program and internship in Germany, enrollment in German has recently increased by 50%, but we have found that because of course scheduling conflicts and other priorities such as permanent job offers, etc., only about 15% of our German students find that they can take advantage of this opportunity after all their other requirements have been prioritized. We, and I in particular, have therefore become quite involved in counselling individual students and supervising their efforts to secure German internships privately. As part of

the development and education of a future international manager, this approach may even be more beneficial than simply taking advantage of a ready-made program, since it forces the student to take the initiative, develops his entrepreneurial spirit, and, quite practically, represents a dry-run of his eventual quest for a permanent job.

So, how do we go about helping our students to apply for German internships? I have brought along some handouts for you on every phase of the process from government regulations to strategies for the personal interview, all of which will also be useful to the student applying for a permanent job with a German firm. But let me deal briefly with each necessary step.

The first thing to be considered are European Community and German Federal and local laws and regulations affecting Americans who seek employment in the Federal Republic. I am happy to report, and some of you may already be aware of the fact, that the restrictions and bureaucratic obligations for temporary workers, such as interns, are minimal. The federal law applicable in the case of an intern would be that a U.S. passport holder staying longer than 3 months with gainful employment, but not intending to immigrate, does not need a visa prior to entering the Federal Republic. Upon arrival, however, he does need a residence and/or work permit which must be applied for at the local immigration office (Auslanderbehorde) must be applied for immediately.

Details of how to go about this and photocopies of the necessary documents are are included in the handouts. Further, all persons living in Germany must report their address to the registration office (Einwohnermeldeamt). A health examination is also mandatory. Students and interns seeking short-term (up to three months) employment do not need a work permit under EEC laws for non-citizens of European member states. The student should apply at least 3 months ahead of the time he wishes to begin his internship. How will you and your student know what firms to apply to? You or your department should subscribe to Handelsblatt or Wirtshaftswoche, both of which have identical career-counselling inserts ("Karriere"). These supplements are not only a source for finding internship opportunities, but they also feature very good articles on job-seeking skills and job market conditions in West Germany. Other helpful sources specifically intended for university graduates embarking on business careers, and containing many internship and other job offers and information, are the periodicals Der Akedemiker, Forum, and Innovatio. These appear twice or three times a year and can be subscribed to at minimal cost; all necessary information is in your handout packets. I have also added a list of German firms that have in the recent past given internships to Thunderbird graduates. Naturally, every time you go back to Germany for a visit, you should make every effort to

establish personal contacts with German firms, in order to add to your list of possible employers. This is relatively easy to do, because German firms are very public-relations conscious. You need only say, for example, that you are a U.S. language professor who is researching the response of German firms to environmental pollution problems for your lectures in the U.S., and you will usually get a tour, be treated to lunch, and come away with about 5 lbs. of expensive P.R. material which, by the way, will prove very useful as teaching materials in your business language classes.

In general, perhaps owing to the centuries-old tradition of internship in the apprentice-journeyman-master sequence of education in the trades, and also because of public and government pressures, German firms are very open to interns from within and without the FRG. They know it is expected of them to give young people a leg up on the career ladder. German firms that seem especially interested in American interns at this time are Braun, a Gillette subsidiary, which offers 6-month internships and will then permanently employ suitable candidates in their U.S. operations. Siemens, too, is always looking for promising young Americans, and so is Nixdorf, the German computer manufacturer, because usually Americans are already thoroughly familiar with computers and seem to have a natural affinity for them, according to a Nixdorf manager I talked to. If your student is more

interested in Austria or Switzerland, you should write for information on how to get internships in those countries to their U.S. chambers of commerce, but the conditions, rules, etc., are bound to be very similar.

Armed with a list of firm names, the student should write to as many of them as possible, sending a curriculum vitae both in English and German with an accompanying letter also in both languages. I have included the latest format samples for both, as well as rules and hints on how to apply, accept or reject offers, interview strategies, etc.

I have brought along also a typical contract sent to one of my students by Lever Sutter GmbH, to give you an idea of hours, pay, vacation, etc., of a typical internship. This particular one is for six months, June through November, stipulates a 40-hour work week, 15 days of paid vacation within the six-month period, and a gross salary of DM 900.- per month, enough to survive on. The contract has several pages of clauses on secrecy and privacy, the so-called data-protection law, (Datenschutzgesetz).

As in the case of Braun, promising young American interns can often parley these internships into permanent positions, and we need not hesitate to hold out this possibility to our students. I know, we have all been cautioned about the twin spectres of high unemployment in the FRG (12-13%) and the EEC employment laws which force companies to give preferential consideration to applicants from member

countries. Let me say that during my recent 6-week stay in West Germany, I was informed again and again by company executives and university professors alike, that the unemployed are almost exclusively unskilled workers and Gastarbeiter (foreign "guest workers"), but that management positions go begging. At the European Business School, each of the most recent group of graduates had an average 2.6 permanent job offers; that's offers, not interviews!

As regards the Common Market employment laws, here again I was informed there is a dearth of suitable applicants (which corroborates what I just said about the selective unemployment situation), and nowadays an interested firm simply fills out a standard form, an affidavit stating that they have done the requisite applicant search within the member countries, but have not found anyone as well qualified as the non-member citizen applicant.

If employment with a German firm in Germany proves unattainable, there are still excellent possibilities of working for a U.S. subsidiary in the FRG, Austria or Switzerland, or for a German subsidiary in the U.S., such as in the case of Braun. There are now more than 2,000 subsidiaries of major German firms in the U.S., and their number is growing almost daily. By the way, the directory of these firms can be ordered from the German/American Chamber of Commerce in New York for about $25.00.

In whatever situation the successful intern find himself

after he has completed his program, the internship will have helped make him more employable in a position of responsibility and challenge (and better pay) than he would have been without it. Further, we, the instructors, will feel good, because we have helped our student set his foot on the first rung of the ladder of success, while proving that studying German grammar can indeed lead to better things. And finally, students, realizing the benefits of a foreign-language internship, will flock to your business German courses in droves.

I hope that I have provided you with some helpful hints and ideas on how to help find internships for your students. Time limits did not permit more detailed remarks, but I will be only too happy to answer questions after the session or help you with additional material if I can.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.